

**PROPOSED BILL No. 444 – “An act concerning secretaries in state correctional facilities”...
that the statute be amended to include secretaries working in state correctional facilities as
hazardous duty employees for the purposes of their state pensions.**

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee:

My name is Wendy Giammarino and I live in Stafford . I will be speaking today on Bill #444 which refers “to amending statute 5-173 to include secretaries working in correctional facilities as hazardous duty employees for the purposes of their state pensions”. Please support the Bill in an effort to correct a disparity that has existed for some time in reference to a group of Tier II/IIA correctional employees. We are predominantly women, who have served for over twenty years and co-exist daily in the same correctional environment as other security staff.

Clerical in Corrections have always been active participants in supporting the terms of incarceration for inmates but in recent years changes in release policies requires a higher level of involvement. Inmates now have more rights than ever and demand more results. We are no longer just records-keepers. The nature of our work requires us to assess, monitor, and intercede in order to fulfill behavioral obligations for early release and creates additional risk. In some ways, our expertise requires more intervention than other security staff. We are required to read disturbing reports to determine victim status and are caught in codes in the take-down of an inmate even though we do not participate. Many times we are the first line of offense because we run security clearances and make recommendations in the interests of safety. Such is the case with time credits for release, visiting and contact status, report writing regarding incidences, and issues with mail handling. Secretaries and medical personnel have been known to interview one on one as notaries and provide assistance with medical status in support of other front-line staff. At times we are left alone in areas within or just outside the units without coverage or self-defense training. We are at risk due to tainted mail which may come to us first and are at risk to diseases such as tuberculosis and hepatitis for which we no longer receive vaccination. If worker comp claims are submitted, exposure is treated as questionable even though we are in a susceptible environment. Some inmates become easily familiar and have also been known to contact clerical once released without permission. Response results in verbal intimidation, threats of lawsuits, and familiarity and is of concern.

As for myself, I've been left alone in a locked office with an inmate who was irate because he held me responsible for making him go to school (allowed in by the officer w/o support). I've been caught in codes when there is a need to go to the operations offices or to escort personnel to the medical unit where there are large groups of inmates. I've been locked in a stairwell with groups of inmates without a body alarm and no officer in sight. I receive frequent verbal threats of lawsuits or complaints to the Commissioner and Governor, not only from the inmates but from family members who cannot visit because they are victims or have criminal histories. The meaning of the term “unpleasant” is inadequate to the environment in which we work when at times it is considered alarming.

It is for this reason that many of us who have already achieved twenty years or more and are close to retirement age are re-evaluating our personal choices, since thirty eight years is no longer sustainable. It is believed the current statute does not reflect the appropriate conditions for clerical in correctional institutions due to the hazards of the environment and we believe there is sufficient probable cause for a change. Our request for change in legislation has been submitted many times in the past and supported but not considered due to the economic climate and unfunded ratio. The stock market has improved and the legislature has passed a schedule to achieve full pension funding in twenty years. We urge you to include our time already served toward hazardous duty pension level. (We realize that this will no doubt require some pay-in on our part.) It is unclear what may be achieved through legislation considering the changes in contract for all Tier levels but we thank you for the opportunity to speak on this issue in the hope there may be some resolution.